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ABSTRACT

Traditional approaches to education use the level of inputs as a measure of effectiveness. Outcomes-based education (OBE) is based on the concept that educational success should be measured by what students learn, rather than by what they are taught. As a systems-level restructuring tool, OBE calls for success for all students, not just academic or vocational success, but success as well-rounded human beings. Since OBE has developed from several sources, it does not have one single authoritative model. Basic principles form the foundation of OBE: a clear focus on outcomes, expanded opportunity and instructional support, and high expectations for learning success. Views differ on whether OBE is revolutionary in education or merely a repackaging of old methods. School districts adopting OBE must fully commit to it in spirit and in practice, and staff must abandon established methods and procedures. Outcomes also must not be confused with subject areas, and goals cannot be too narrowly defined. In the classroom, teachers must balance concerns about content and process, and develop new assessment tools. As found in several Oregon schools, OBE can be implemented gradually, but must involve all members of the school district and community. (Contains 27 references.) (JPT)

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# Outcomes-Based Education

## Tool for Restructuring

Gwennis McNeir

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# OSSC BULLETIN

# OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

## Tool for Restructuring

Gwennis McNeir

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# Preface

The acute need for educational reform, which has been building on a national level for at least the past decade, was made manifest in Oregon in 1991 with the passage of the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century. This legislation mandates the creation of Certificates of Initial and Advanced Mastery that require students to demonstrate specific skills they have learned. This implies movement toward outcomes-based education (OBE).

While most Oregon educators welcome the impetus for change if it enhances student success, many educators are uncertain about how to accomplish the transition from traditional educational methods to an outcomes-based system. Some are unclear about exactly what is meant by *outcomes-based education*. This Bulletin seeks to address the questions and concerns educators may have and to offer suggestions for making a smoother transition to OBE.

The Bulletin begins by examining the need for outcomes-based reform and the limitations of traditional methods. Chapter 1 explores the background of the OBE movement and examines how schools have put OBE into practice. Chapter 2 introduces many of the challenges schools encounter after adopting an OBE approach. Chapter 3 offers keys to success discovered by practitioners of OBE both in Oregon and across the United States. The conclusion offers a brief glimpse of how OBE is faring in Oregon schools.

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# Introduction

We have become increasingly aware over the last few decades that as American society prepares to leap into the next century, its educational system lags behind, stuck in outdated methods. In fact, "the contention of the reformers is that American public schools designed for the 19th century are incapable of solving the problems that will face us in the 21st" (Darling-Hammond 1990).

The cry for reform does not just issue from within the education system itself. A growing number of voices from the community, including parents, business leaders, employers, college admissions offices, and politicians express dismay at the thought of America as a "nation at risk." The demand for direct action has led to legislation in which states outline specific goals for school districts to meet in order to improve student achievement.

As schools take steps to accomplish these goals, one of the first tasks they face is to admit that the old model isn't working. As Stan Friedland (1992) explains, "Our insistence on continuing the same curriculum, the same format, with the same methods...will not succeed because we have different students from a different era with significantly different needs."

In most current educational settings, learning is defined according to a certain volume and intensity of "input." Traditionally, the entire education system has been organized around the calendar and the clock, and administrative practices are designed for convenient control, as well as monitoring and grouping of students. Teachers are required to organize their courses according to the length of the semester, number of minutes in the class period, and amount of material to be covered. According to William G. Spady (1988), "this calendar-based model emphasizes curriculum coverage over student mastery."

When a number of students are exposed to a certain amount of subject material for a certain length of time, learning is assumed, even expected to occur. The problem is, this input-based approach simply isn't helping school systems to attain high rates of student achievement. Instead, the result

is a bell-shaped curve, with a few students performing very well, a handful performing poorly, and most attaining average or below-average performance. Sadly, as Spady points out, this is also referred to as the "normal" curve.

In contrast to traditional methods, the outcomes-based education (OBE) model defines learning not by what students have been taught, but by what they can demonstrate they have learned. As Chester E. Finn, Jr. (1990) explains, "under the new definition, now struggling to be born, education is the result achieved, the learning that takes root when the process has been effective." This system of education is not organized according to time constraints; instead it is based on what outcomes students should be able to demonstrate before leaving the system. These outcomes are not based on narrow content requirements, but on a district's vision of what a student needs to possess in order to succeed in the twenty-first century. These visionary outcomes are derived through the collaboration of legislators, administrators, teachers, and community members.

According to Spady and many others, OBE is an idea whose time has come. Although the seeds of OBE have been around for decades, the system in its current form has been steadily gaining in popularity during recent years, because it offers a way to address state and district goals, combining accountability concerns with increased school autonomy. In addition, OBE strives to increase student effectiveness and to ensure success for all children. While outcomes-based education is a potentially powerful tool for school transformation, it presents many challenges in the areas of implementation and practice.

*Chapter 1*

# Defining the Vision

The outcomes-based education (OBE) movement as it exists today represents the culmination of ideas about school reform that have been developing over several decades. Its current framework encompasses concerns about demonstrable skills, increased educational opportunity, and issues of accountability, but goes beyond these particular concerns to embrace systems-level change.

## The Seeds of Reform

Though OBE has the potential to radically reshape the concept of education as we think of it today, many of the precepts encompassed by OBE have been evolving since the 1960s and even earlier. The need for a redefinition of the educational system became apparent after James Coleman's watershed 1966 report revealed that, in spite of increased educational opportunities for at-risk children, their level of achievement had not necessarily improved.

The idea that educational "inputs" are not directly linked with desired outcomes called into question the effectiveness of the system as a whole and led to a flurry of research and analysis. Finn explains that "once one defines education in terms of learning, it is possible to work backward from what is or isn't learned by a particular group of people and investigate the reasons why." The investigation into limitations of the traditional system led to several new educational strategies that attempted to increase educational opportunity for at-risk students and to better prepare them for the outside world.

Competency-based education, for example, was created as a response to concerns that students were not adequately prepared to enter the work force upon graduating from high school. CBE focused on having students

show proficiency in specific skills as part of their graduation requirement. Although education theorists such as William Spady argued that CBE programs should focus on more inclusive outcome goals, many such programs ended up testing only a narrow spectrum of basic skills. As Jean King and Karen Evans (1991) point out, "In its ideal form, CBE contained all the elements of OBE; however, the lack of agreement as to what 'competency' represented ultimately doomed it." CBE survives today in the form of vocational training programs.

In Benjamin Bloom's model of Mastery Learning, another relative of OBE, students are grouped according to their level of command over the material. Both length of time spent on the material and method of instruction are varied depending on the needs of each group. The principle behind Mastery Learning is that all students can eventually master a given curriculum if they are given enough time and if a teacher can adapt his or her approach to meet individual needs.

In addition to changes in educational practice, teachers and administrators in the last few decades have been forced to confront pressure from their communities and from legislators regarding accountability issues. A growing sense of America as a "nation at risk," a nation whose educational system is failing, has led to a demand for concrete proof of student achievement as well as more avenues for citizen input and teacher evaluation.

The concerns inherent in these ideas and related concepts, such as Ralph Tyler's notion of educational objectives and Glaser's argument for criterion-referenced measurement, are addressed in the modern version of OBE. In addition, today's outcome-based models carry a considerably deepened and expanded vision that ultimately fosters systems-level restructuring. "Success for every student!" is the rallying cry of OBE, and the definition of success used by OBE is not restricted to academic or vocational achievement alone. Practitioners of OBE aspire to produce students who are well-rounded human beings, equipped with the skills and abilities needed to thrive in today's competitive and rapidly changing society.

## More Than One Model

Perhaps because the concept of OBE has developed gradually from a variety of sources over time, it is not restricted to a single authoritative model and is not always referred to by the same name. In fact, "variations on the outcome-based model are appearing with ever-increasing frequency due in part to the fact that OBE is a systems approach to change" (Conley 1993).

William Spady and Albert Mamary offer examples of core frameworks for OBE; Lewis Rhodes applies Deming's principles of management to

school reform; and some districts, such as Pasco, Washington's School District No. 1, generate their own outcomes-based model. Although the form may vary, these models share a vision of high student success achieved by determining specific outcomes and adapting methods and procedures to ensure that all students can demonstrate these outcomes.

**Spady's Outcome-Based Paradigm**

William Spady, one of the foremost advocates and developers of OBE, identifies a basic premise of OBE as "having all students learn well, not just the fastest, the brightest, or the most advantaged." Other premises of OBE are that success breeds success and that schools control the conditions of success. The framework of OBE rests on three key operational principles: clarity of focus on outcomes, expanded opportunity and instructional support, and high expectations for learning success.

To maintain clarity of focus on outcomes, districts must "design down" from the outcomes they want students to demonstrate. These outcomes "need not be limited to basic skills, low-level cognition, and narrow objectives (Spady)." Educators must consider not only the particular skills and facts they want students to retain, but what kinds of things they want students to be able to do, and what kinds of traits and abilities they will need to lead rewarding, successful lives after graduation. Once these "visionary exit outcomes" are established, all other outcomes, from program goals down to individual lesson plans, are be derived from them.

Just as administrators and teachers must remain clear about and focused on outcomes, so students should be informed at all times what goals they are striving to reach, exactly how their performance will be assessed, and how well they are doing in terms of accomplishing those goals. Frequent and specific feedback to students is crucial.

Just as vital is the need to provide students with greater opportunities and more instructional support in the pursuit of those goals. A primary way of supporting students is giving them additional time if they need it to fully grasp material. In some instances, a student who is having difficulty may be given an "Incomplete" rather than a letter grade, and then be graded only after he or she is able to demonstrate competency. Also, students may be given a "second chance" to improve their grade even after an initial grade is assigned. Teachers can also provide individual support for students by using team-teaching methods and by employing an intensive "coaching" approach.

Spady concurs with Bloom, who holds that learning is related to teacher expectations as well as instructional methods. When expectations are higher, students are challenged to excel. Teachers applying the principles of OBE insist that all students attain high performance standards, and teachers

continue to give students extra support and time until those standards are met. Spady (1988) affirms that "students know they have to do high quality work to receive credit, but they also know they will be given the support they need to reach those challenging standards."

**Mamary's Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model**

Like Spady's model, Mamary's Outcome-Driven Developmental Model (ODDM) is a system of complete organizational restructuring. It "employs a systematic change process that is applied to all facets of school operation" (National Diffusion Network 1993). The spirit of its mission statement, that "all students will learn well," is very similar to Spady's first premise. Structurally, however, the model is quite different. The starting point for ODDM is a strong research base, from which issues a philosophical and psychological base connected by what Mamary calls a "transformational leader." These foundations are linked to desired student outcomes by three main branches of support: administrative, community, and teacher.

Tom Vickery (1990) emphasizes the coordinated, complementary manner in which different aspects of the system interact within the ODDM framework. The administrative arm develops a process for change and a staff development model, as well as establishing a good communications network for both staff and community members that facilitates problem solving and climate monitoring. The community branch outlines school board responsibilities. The teaching sector is responsible for developing, in conjunction with administration and community input, the instructional processes, curriculum, school and classroom practices, and organizational structure. Although ODDM is participatory in nature, Vickery stresses the need for a leader who can "inspire action, secure resources, and remove obstacles."

John Champlin (1991) stresses the idea of ODDM as a "holistic, total systems approach" and augments Vickery's description with such key components as accepting change as normal; specifying observable, measurable outcomes for every experience; and maintaining high levels of quality and excellence as well as a strenuous training and support system for both school members and students.

**Deming's Organizational Framework**

In his stimulating article, "Why Quality Is Within Our Grasp...If We Reach," Lewis A. Rhodes (1990) advocates the use of W. Edwards Deming's outcome-based organizational model as a tool for school reform. Deming's model, first applied to the restructuring of Japanese industrial systems,

combines statistical training with core beliefs about people and organizations. The goal of the Deming approach is to yield quality outcomes through the application of four sets of core beliefs related to systems, psychology, and causes of variation. Rhodes stresses that Deming's ideas do not reflect a system or process, but rather "a different way of looking at and understanding our educational world and then acting on what we see."

The notion of *quality* is central to the Deming framework and involves recognition of several features of successful outcomes. One facet is the need for both products and people to accomplish their purposes. In a school organization, the criteria for a quality school might be "its abilities to identify and respond to the differing needs of its students." Rhodes asserts that only in "core production processes" can an organization's outcomes be ensured, as support processes often inhibit rather than enhance flexibility and responsiveness in the core process. Finally, quality results emerge from frequent, informed interaction between the worker and the objects of work, and between workers and the processes that support them.

The first component of Deming's philosophical framework is the belief that humans want to be effective. He believes that intrinsic motivation is a key aspect of human dignity and self-respect, that healthy organizations support this characteristic, and that grades and other externally based incentives can be destructive to this "natural inclination to learn and to be innovative" (cited in Rhodes). In addition, Deming contends that organizations are connected systems that require management of connections. In order for components of a system to effectively work together, a system must have a specific aim, a knowledge of interrelationships between all components in the system, and a sense of communication and cooperation. Finally, Deming asserts that both management and labor are trapped in processes they feel powerless to control. "Eighty to 90 percent of variations in expected outcomes are caused by problems in the system or process, not the worker," Rhodes explains.

Deming's concept does not claim to offer a specific blueprint for outcomes-based restructuring, but rather offers a beginning place for asking important questions about schools. Rhodes offers four preliminary questions from a Deming perspective: (1) What is the system? (2) What is the nature of the work? (3) What is the aim of the schooling work process? and (4) What is the work of district leaders? He cites the major strengths of the Deming process as a belief system that many can identify with, an underlying commitment to human growth, and an understanding of the interconnectedness of systems.

### The Pasco School District OBE Model

Influenced by the Deming framework and by Tyler's curriculum development process, School District No. 1 in Pasco, Washington, has found success with an outcomes-based model it developed and implemented in 1979. Superintendent Larry Nyland (1991) defines six essential elements: vision, knowledge, action, results, restructuring, and teaming.

Pasco developed a controlling *vision* shared by other outcomes-based systems: success for all students. This goal carried special weight in District No. 1, where nearly half of the student population could be considered at-risk. A formal mission statement that included five exit outcomes was enacted into policy by the school board. The next component of Pasco's model—*knowledge*—addressed the question "What do we know and believe?" Teachers were trained over a three-year period to use the instructional process, beginning with a core group of teachers and eventually producing trainers for each building.

This knowledge was translated into the next component, *action*, through training in Bloom's mastery learning; Glasser's reality therapy, which encourages personal accountability; and team teaching. The Pasco district measured *results* by participating in ongoing research projects that investigated better methods of assessment and by giving personnel regular feedback. These four components (vision, knowledge, action, and results) were then combined in a dynamic cycle through the process of *restructuring*, empowered by *teaming* strategies. Nyland considers teaming essential in the OBE model because it allows for shared responsibility in planning, placement of students, and student discipline as well as providing essential support for teachers as they put new knowledge into practice.

## Long-Term Implications: Reform or Merely Repackaging?

Committing to the ideas inherent in these models constitutes a dramatic reevaluation of the nature and function of our current education system. We are challenged not only to clarify our purpose and role as educators, but to define what kind of people we want to be and what sort of world we want to live in. If the vision of OBE practitioners is fully realized, then children emerging at the end of an outcomes-based program of schooling will carry much more than specific academic knowledge. They will also possess the skills needed to make them a successful human being in a personal, societal, and global sense.

For Finn, this new way of thinking is nothing less than revolutionary. He believes that the shift from educational inputs to outcomes will have deep and long-lasting ramifications, on par with earlier revolutions in science in

which our world view was fundamentally and permanently changed. He judges that history "is going to view the final third of this century as a time when the very meaning of education was recast." Possibilities for profound change in our definition of education include a completely different understanding of compulsory education, an expanded array of delivery systems, a broader conception of "teacher," abandonment of established notions of time-based schooling, and an almost unlimited range of study materials and learning mechanisms.

At the other extreme, Colleen Capper and Michael Jamison (1992) charge that OBE is really only pseudo-reform and is merely substituting one set of authoritarian, controlling structures for another. Using several different paradigms of contemporary criticism, they argue that OBE is not revolutionary at all but rather a "repackaging of ideas that perpetuate the structural functionalist paradigm of the educational power elite and again leaves populations with little social power and inequitable educational opportunities."

They point to the dominating and controlling aspects of OBE, particularly in assessment and grouping, and suggest that the outcomes-based approach may exclude students with cognitive disabilities who may never be able to reach particular objectives. Capper and Jamison also suggest that when defining objectives, OBE practitioners may look to the values of the mainstream and encourage conformity. Also, the students themselves are conspicuously absent from the outcomes-development process. In addition, they critique the epistemological ramifications of the controlling/subduing values inherent in OBE terms such as *mastery* and *success*. And finally, they are wary of enriched curriculum programs to which only certain students are allowed access.

Critiques of OBE such as Capper and Jamison offer ought to be carefully considered, and no program of restructuring should be adopted without careful examination not only of the overt principles but of the underlying assumptions and structures of authority. But whether or not OBE is the ultimate panacea for overhauling our educational system, schools that have been involved in OBE programs over the last decade are boasting impressive results.

In 1987, the Network for Outcomes-Based Schools received a grant to develop a pilot program for implementing OBE systems, named the "High Success" program. Just one year later, one member of the program, Alhambra High School in Phoenix, Arizona, reported "increases in their students' attendance, motivation, attention to course work, self-esteem, and confidence" as well as enthusiasm and renewed commitment from staff members (Briggs 1988). Another "High Success" school district in Sparta, Illinois, described dramatic improvement in test scores and grades and a renewed confidence within the community about Sparta schools (Brown 1988).

School systems outside the High Success program also report extremely positive yields from their OBE processes. The East Islip School District in New York successfully applied OBE concepts in a way that enabled students to "connect one fragment of instruction to another, one class period to another, one grade level to another—and, ultimately, to extend learning from the schools into students' daily lives" (Smith 1990). Six years after implementing an OBE system at Red Bank in New Jersey, the superintendent reports that basic skills scores are now above the national norm, even though many children had been two or three years below grade level when OBE was first implemented.

Encouraged by dramatic results like these, inspired by the OBE philosophy, and challenged by ever-increasing legislation seeking to improve the quality of public schooling, districts across the country are taking steps to implement OBE programs of their own. The journey from OBE theory to implementation and practice is rewarding but also provides educators with a variety of challenges.

*Chapter 2*

# Challenges in Implementation

Districts preparing to adopt an OBE system and to reap its benefits must be aware that the implementation process carries with it many challenges. Failure to fully commit to OBE, difficulty in making the transition, and failure to effectively address instructional implications are among the obstacles identified by districts currently practicing OBE. Awareness of these problems is the first step toward solving them. In addition, Spady and Marshall remind us that there is more than one way to practice OBE methods.

## Avoiding Real Change

Probably the most dangerous pitfall for schools is to adopt the philosophy of OBE without making any of the necessary underlying changes. To avoid the daunting task of rethinking every aspect of their current system, some schools simply stick with their existing curricula and assessment procedures and just use a new name to refer to an old process. David Conley (1993) observes that

> it is possible to take existing course requirements and objectives, change their name to "outcomes," and continue with essentially the same system that existed previously. Now instead of saying that students have failed a class, the teacher says that they have not yet mastered all the outcomes.

Schools that fall into this trap are not being true to the underlying spirit and principles of OBE. Instead, they are practicing what Conley suggests is closer to competency-based education, in which the focus is on learning narrow, lower-level skill requirements. In genuine OBE, visionary exit outcomes are determined first, and the curriculum is built upon these outcomes. In schools that have not effected the authentic change implied by

OBE, the outcomes are determined by the existing curriculum.

The irony of this misguided approach is that even when teachers train students in narrow subject requirements, the focusing principles of OBE will lead to greater academic success in these areas. However, concentrating on narrow, short-term goals has little genuine benefit. Attaining highly specific skills and knowledge is ultimately limiting for students unless it has relevance outside the classroom, is connected to skills needed in the outside world, and aids the student in being a successful person.

## Taking the Leap

"Without true commitment and courage, no one will be able to significantly affect the educational learning climate in any given situation," observes Michael P. Stevens (1990). Districts that choose to fully incorporate the premises and principles of OBE must begin by confronting what for some is the biggest challenge of all: facing up to the seemingly overwhelming task of complete restructuring. As they commence this daunting assignment, districts are concerned about motivating people to make the transition; finding the time and energy to do the complex, large-scale planning required; undertaking the process of determining outcomes; and matching their goals with federal and state requirements.

### Letting Go of Fixed Beliefs

Established methods and procedures die hard, even when they are no longer functional. It can sometimes be difficult for staff members to let go of entrenched ideas; letting go is especially hard when "a deeply ingrained belief structure is involved, complete with all the convictions, assumptions, and presumed causal links that practitioners have held dear since their own student days" (Finn). Administrators must work to inspire staff to fully accept the principles of OBE and to let go of previously held assumptions about the "right" way of doing things. King and Evans emphasize the need for extensive staff development and ongoing evaluation as districts make the transition to OBE.

Sometimes the process of winning staff over to the ideas of OBE takes time and the patience to wait for them to see results. Nyland describes an extensive training program in his district in which a core of teachers was trained for each building. "Even then," he recounts, "one teacher was reported to have said 'Oh, you want me to DO this?!'" Other teachers, however, recount facing challenging situations with confidence because "our reorganization has resulted in better teaching and better learning"

(Buffington, Curd, and Lunt 1988). Once staff members begin to see the results of applying these new ideas, they usually become dedicated to OBE.

Even when the staff and administration are ready and willing to implement OBE, many districts are stunned by the sheer amount of time and energy required to construct an OBE system. Conley cautions that "for a school system to refocus itself around transformational outcomes requires changes in nearly every element of its structure and culture." The restructuring process may involve retreats, extra inservice days, more work during the summer, and extra meetings. Most practitioners recommend that all levels of administration and staff be involved in these proceedings.

**Outcomes: Many Things to Many People**

When schools begin to define the visionary exit outcomes that are the foundation of the OBE system, a new set of challenges may come up as they are dialoguing among themselves and with members of the school board and the community. The term *outcomes*, notes Robert Rothman (1993), "has taken on the characteristics of a buzzword, meaning different things to different people." One problem described earlier is that of confusing outcomes with subject areas and defining goals that are too narrow and content-specific.

Conversely, the very scope and visionary nature of OBE exit outcomes may pose a different dilemma. Conley reminds us that

> This notion of standards as expressions of values is central to understanding this movement. Although many of the standards, or outcomes, may not look terribly different from existing activities, there is a valuing process going on here nonetheless. In many cases, educators, boards of education, and parents are affirming for the first time what is most important, what must be mastered by all students, what the core values of the school as an educational institution are.

In some communities, groups may object to using a value-centered approach in education, deeming such considerations inappropriate for the educational arena.

In Pennsylvania, for example, the OBE concept was initially adopted in 501 school districts statewide. In February1993, however, the House of Representatives voted to nullify the mandate. The contention of critics was that the idea was too radical and "potentially disastrous." Many felt that the OBE method "fostered the teaching of 'values' rather than academic skills and knowledge" (Rothman). Similarly, at Reynolds High School in Troutdale, Oregon, Assistant Principal Dennis Sizemore reports some concerns by a few members of the community. At one meeting, members of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, a conservative right-wing group, showed up to

voice their disapproval of the outcomes-development process. The same group is currently publishing material criticizing the "values" aspect of OBE.

Examples like these underscore the importance of developing exit outcomes through constant dialogue and feedback from all aspects of the school system and the community. To avoid serious future conflicts, the concerns of skeptics and critics must be considered. Districts must make an effort to address controversy that may arise through misunderstanding or lack of agreement about the nature and function of outcomes.

**Lining Up District and State Goals**

For many districts, the call for outcomes-based restructuring has come through state legislation. States define the required outcomes, while schools are asked to develop their own specific plans for achieving those objectives. Schools are then held accountable for meeting those goals, and in some states, such as Florida, districts that fail to demonstrate improvement risk state intervention. This relationship between state control and school autonomy is a somewhat uneasy one.

The North Carolina guidelines for developing pilot plans, for example, outline eleven criteria for initiating OBE programs, each with a significant amount of related legislation. At the same time, the guidelines encourage individual OBE programs "to be innovative" and state that the Department of Public Instruction intends "to provide maximum flexibility for the pilot programs" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 1992). In Florida, after defining ten performance-based student indicators, the state legislature agreed to waive dozens of statutes, allowing schools to pursue those indicators in any way they saw fit.

Establishing greater control over the ends of an educational system while loosening up restrictions concerning the means has potentially positive effects but also poses problems. For one, as schools develop their own OBE pilot programs they must face the intimidating task of creating a completely different set of assessment procedures. Conventional tests are designed to assess narrow, subject-specific knowledge. States demanding accountability from schools are sometimes unable to find the "proof" they need that programs are working when the method used to assess outcomes is still being developed. Sometimes, people make "bad inferences" and assume the new programs aren't working.

Money can also be a source of controversy. Some districts may feel they need a bigger budget to implement the significant changes required by OBE. However, legislators may be reluctant to let go of purse strings when they are also asked to give up a measure of authority regarding how that money will be spent.

In addition, some schools may simply have access to more resources, financial and otherwise, than others. Several staff members in Oregon schools, for example, expressed in interviews a desire for greater access to professional consultants who can help them get OBE programs started. Other schools may simply be slow to discover innovative ideas, or may lack the strong, visionary leadership needed to spearhead the program. There is concern about delivery standards from both the legislative and district branches.

It may be that some schools do well with less legislative restriction, whereas others may need more top-down guidance and structure. Some districts may fear state intervention, whereas others welcome it when a state authority finally steps in and shows them what to do. In addressing this challenge, it is wise to make a careful assessment of each individual district's needs and resources.

## Instructional Implications

Just as OBE requires rethinking many of the legislative and administrative aspects of a district, so, too, does it challenge many preconceived notions of how teachers should operate in a classroom. Teachers who are implementing OBE programs report making many innovations in classroom practices, but two of the most significant changes they are faced with involve striking a balance between content and process concerns and developing new ways of assessing progress.

### Balancing Content with Process

Many pilot programs outlining plans for OBE restructuring do not mention content requirements or refer to them only briefly. However, this is one of the fundamental challenges facing districts making the transition to OBE. If process is more important than content, which content should be taught? Although Spady asserts that in the highest manifestation of OBE, content is nearly irrelevant (Spady and Marshall 1991), still some subject material must be selected for instructional purposes.

Joan Abrams comments, "Occasionally, we had to make hard decisions about what to keep and what to eliminate from the program. We were guided by the philosophy that whatever we taught had to be important enough for us to require that all children learn it" (Abrams 1985). And Julie Taylor, a teacher at North Eugene (Oregon) High School suggests that "you might consider selective abandonment of certain curriculum requirements."

Decisions about what to keep and what to discard are difficult and

will probably require much discussion and thought. Although many desisions about overall curriculum will be made at the administrative level, it is important to remember that changes in course content will affect how teachers create courses, units, and individual lesson plans.

### Building New Methods of Assessment

Hand in hand with content requirement issues is the question of assessment. If teaching methods and classroom procedures change dramatically, and children are expected to demonstrate mastery of exit outcomes, the current standardized testing system will be completely ineffectual. New methods of testing and assessment need to be developed immediately.

Many schools report good results working with a "portfolio" system, in which an ongoing record of a student's work is kept, including such things as essays, special projects, and artwork. However, this system is less than ideal. One reason is the sheer time and energy involved in evaluating an entire portfolio as opposed to a standardized test. Perhaps even more significant is the lack of agreement among evaluators about the quality of students' work as inferred from individual portfolios.

As educators work to build reliable assessment models for the new outcomes-based programs, some working method of evaluating student progress must be selected. Rothman notes that "while states wait for the new measures to be perfected, officials are building the accountability systems by using existing measures they admit don't match the goals of the new systems" (Rothman 1993). Closing the gap between existing methods of assessment and more accurate means of gauging progress is a primary task for administrators and teachers alike.

## OBE on More Than One Level

As districts address the challenges outlined above, they may be encouraged to discover that OBE need not be an all-or-nothing proposition; it can gradually evolve. In a 1991 article, "Beyond Traditional Outcome-Based Education," William Spady and Kit Marshall identify three different versions of OBE: traditional, transitional, and transformational. Each version represents a different point on the continuum of what OBE can ultimately accomplish.

### Traditional OBE

Districts seeking genuine reform should take care not to fall into the trap of practicing Traditional OBE, which Spady likens to the old model of

competency-based learning. According to Spady, this is the most common form of OBE currently practiced. Although it is highly effective in improving student achievement, it is not really outcome based. Instead, schools begin with the current curriculum and design outcomes around it, never getting at the underlying need for restructuring.

Although students' level of learning is improved using this system, Spady and Marshall see this version of OBE as inherently limiting because the small segments of learning that the students demonstrate only have relevance in a classroom setting. The content and structure of courses remain unrelated to real-life issues or the concept of the student as a total person.

### Transitional OBE

Transitional OBE may be a viable alternative for districts that wish to make significant changes gradually over time. It is practiced by districts that wish to address higher order competencies related to settings beyond the classroom; these districts are not ready, however, to restructure their entire curriculum and delivery systems.

Districts practicing Transitional OBE strive to have graduates who are broadly competent. Their exit outcomes are designed for success in the outside world but do not focus with absolute specificity on future conditions. Curriculum content already in place is adapted to match these higher order outcomes. According to Conley, some of the merits of the Transitional OBE approach are that it

> allows faculty to become familiar with the concepts and key principles of outcome-based education. It permits teachers to retain their disciplinary backgrounds as a framework within which they might consider more integrated learning experiences, and it allows schools to communicate with parents in ways that may still be somewhat familiar.

Transitional OBE may be an excellent beginning place for many districts.

### Transformational OBE

If Transitional OBE gives some districts a place to start, then Transformational OBE offers them something to aim for. Spady and Marshall describe Transformational OBE as "the highest evolution of the OBE concept." Districts practicing Transformational OBE view the function of the education system as a means to equip all students to succeed after leaving the system. The districts are guided by a vision of the graduate as a "competent future citizen," and are willing to change any existing feature of the system in order to accomplish that vision. When establishing future-driven out-

comes, they set aside their existing curriculum and instead turn an intensely focused eye toward outside world conditions that their students are likely to encounter upon graduation.

## Shared Wisdom

Ultimately, each school system will address the challenges of OBE in a unique way. Identifying potential obstacles at the outset allows for trouble-shooting and brainstorming among administrators and staff. However, just as practitioners of OBE have encountered obstacles in common, they have also discovered guideposts for effective implementation.

*Chapter 3*

# Keys to Success

Although OBE poses a variety of challenges in the implementation process, practitioners are able to overcome these hurdles by remaining faithful to a few key principles. Again and again, districts emphasize the importance of involving everyone in the process, creating clear and focused outcomes, and allowing enough time to make things work and to witness authentic results.

## A Community Coalition

Schools that have established successful OBE programs stress the importance of involving school personnel on every level, as well as school board members, community members, and the students themselves. This kind of collective partnership is fundamental in the planning stages as well as in implementation and evaluation.

### Laying the Groundwork

Numerous schools report that a key component of launching a successful OBE program is to involve members of every sector of the education system from the very beginning. Mike Weddle, chairperson of the Schools for the 21st Century Council and teacher at Waldo Middle School in Salem, Oregon, asserts that "the most successful thing we've done is to involve all of the staff on the brainstorming level." Schools accomplish this involvement in a variety of ways.

The Sioux City (Iowa) Community School District began by conducting a survey using the Delphi Technique, in which several different rounds of statements about a particular issue are administered to participants over several weeks. Participants rank their responses using a six-point Likert

Scale; in addition, they are given the opportunity to make written comments. Some of the advantages of using this technique are that "the issues are clarified, the final result is likely to reflect much more careful thought than would be obtained from a single questionnaire, and the method tends to build consensus since each participant is asked to examine his own response more than once in the light of other responses" (Burns and Wood 1989). Initiating the process with this technique allowed people to voice their concerns and to think about the implications of moving to OBE before face-to-face discussion began.

Stevens emphasizes the need for inclusiveness: "Everyone in the organization must feel needed and believe that their opinions and ideas are valued. They must feel the need to change; they must not be told that they have to change." A principal can facilitate this process by getting personnel involved in reaching consensus about beliefs, collecting internal and external scanning data, and identifying Critical Success Factors. The next task is to work collectively to analyze strengths and weaknesses of the current program and to establish strategic goals and specific objectives for restructuring (Herman 1990).

Getting people involved in the planning stages by assigning them specific tasks has also proved successful for Karen Goirigolzarri, principal of Roseburg (Oregon) Senior High School, where OBE has been an outgrowth of a grassroots effort. The OBE system in her district began with the formation of seven task forces, comprised mainly of teachers, who went on a retreat to brainstorm ideas for addressing specific problems at their school. The result was a realization by the task forces that what they had been talking about in their idea of change was OBE. With a core of staff support and a supportive superintendent, they are now moving toward an effort to generate community understanding and support. Similarly, Julie McCann, a teacher at Fairplay Elementary in Corvallis, Oregon, comments that "the more we dialogue and share information, the more understanding we gain and the more support we get."

### Mobilizing Support

Applying a collective approach to classroom practices has also been highly effective for many schools. Nyland underscores the importance of team teaching to the successful OBE program in place at Pasco, Washington. Using the teaming method, teachers share planning, placement, and discipline responsibilities and are able to provide expanded support for one another as well as for students. This additional assistance appears to inspire teachers to take more initiative and to collaborate on proposing innovative ideas.

Three high school English teachers in Tempe, Arizona, worked effectively as a team to propose and then implement an outcomes-based program at their school. They worked together to define outcomes and then created a pool of assessment outcomes. They employed a "parallel" teaching method that allowed for joint planning and scheduling as well as regrouping and sharing of students. Although these innovative methods presented challenges, the mutual support system was extremely beneficial. "Given our own satisfaction and the success of our students," one teacher concludes, "none of us will go back to our old way of doing things" (Buffington, Curd, and Lunt).

Student involvement in the process is a significant factor, one that is often overlooked in reports on successful OBE programs. Several Oregon districts, however, have found the student response to be one of the most rewarding aspects. Dennis Sizemore, assistant principal at Reynolds High School in Troutdale, Oregon, describes how a teacher developed a social studies unit about the environment using student input. "She began by asking students what they knew about the topic, and what they wanted to know," he recounts. She felt the resulting unit was one of the clearest, most effective lesson plans she ever taught.

At North Eugene (Oregon) High School, teacher Julie Taylor comments that one thing she has enjoyed about implementing OBE at her school is that "it puts more responsibility on the students for their own education." Once students are informed of what the outcomes are, often they will assess their own progress. "They will come up to me and say, 'Hey, I haven't been given an opportunity to meet this standard yet'," Taylor remarks. She feels that giving students clear guidelines and involving them in the goal-setting process helps to make their schooling more relevant.

**Taking Stock: Listening to a Variety of Voices**

As evaluation procedures are established for OBE systems, many schools find it crucial to collect ongoing feedback from all sectors in the educational process. In the school district in Winona, Minnesota, a continual communications network reinforces the adopted vision while constantly evaluating how well things are going. The district keeps communications channels flowing both internally and externally, and is considering developing a district information specialist specifically for OBE-related intelligence.

At Pasco School District, practitioners of OBE suggest having regularly scheduled informal evaluations among faculty and staff in addition to formal evaluation procedures. Asking core questions such as "What went well?", "What would you do differently next time?", and "What help do you need now?" help to create an organization that is constantly learning.

In addition to these communication channels, schools list regular meetings, community forums, workshops, and "report cards" sent out to the community as methods of evaluating progress and obtaining feedback from a broad spectrum of constituents.

## Creating a Clear Blueprint

Precise, viable exit outcomes lie at the heart of every successful outcomes-based model. The key for most districts seems to be developing outcomes that are broad in their vision, but specific enough to be taught and measured effectively. In addition, the number of outcomes must be honed to a manageable size. Once the goals are determined, districts must maintain a clear, unswerving focus on those objectives at all times.

### Samples of Working Outcomes

Outcomes generated by successful OBE schools remain true to the basic premises and principles of OBE. These schools strive to create outcomes that reflect a vision of what kind of world graduates will be facing when they leave the system, and what kind of knowledge and abilities will best help them succeed in all aspects of life.

Reynolds High School in Troutdale, Oregon, was one of the first Oregon schools to generate a complete set of exit outcomes. For each of these outcomes, Reynolds High will develop specific performance indicators and assessment techniques to determine level of mastery. Troutdale's outcomes include:

- Quality producers
- Collaborative contributors
- Effective communicators
- Adaptable problem solvers/perceptive thinkers
- Community contributors
- Individual achievers
- Lifelong learners

Numerous districts have developed exit outcomes similar to the ones created at Troutdale, which were in turn inspired by the two core outcomes generated at Aurora Public Schools in Colorado: Collaborative Workers and Quality Producers.

At East Islip School District in New York, exit outcomes seem to center slightly more on personal awareness and effectiveness and less on

community participation. The district developed five goals that were then integrated into all curriculum areas. The goals are as follows:

1. Each student will develop high self-esteem.

2. Each student will master the skills of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

3. All students will use these skills for developing processes for problem solving, decision making, and communication.

4. Each student will become a self-directed learner.

5. Each student will demonstrate concern for others.

Most districts note that generating concise yet comprehensive outcomes required a great deal of planning and discussion. The time invested in developing these goals was well spent, however, as these outcomes now provide a solid framework for the OBE program as a whole.

### Staying Focused

Once outcomes have been defined, they must be continually referred back to as other aspects of the OBE system are developed. Keeping exit outcomes in mind at all times can be easy when a program is still on paper, but more difficult once it is in practice. Educators cite ongoing concentration on outcome goals as crucial to OBE success.

Mike Weddle, teacher at Waldo Middle School and chairman of the 21st Century Schools Council, and Dennis Sizemore, assistant principal at Reynolds High School, have both observed the challenge for teachers of translating larger exit outcomes into specific classroom activities. "We're still waiting for a depth of understanding there, " comments Sizemore, "where in-class exercises are really being connected to exit outcomes."

Spady and Marshall urge OBE practitioners to "ensure clarity of focus on outcomes of significance." In addition, they remind educators to carefully align each aspect of curriculum design and instruction with the initial exit outcomes. Schools that are able to achieve this clarity have mastered one of the fundamental components of a successful OBE system.

## Time To Grow

The most crucial element of success in implementing an OBE system is also the most overlooked, perhaps because it appears at first glance to be self-evident. Schools must allow enough time to carefully plan their program

and to evaluate its results. The vision of restructuring offered by the OBE model must be sustained if it is to truly transform.

Stevens rues the fact that school administrators who are genuinely interested in reform must all too often change districts for financial or political reasons before their plans can really get off the ground. He argues that "meaningful school improvement is unlikely without this commitment and patience. Quality leadership and instructional leadership must finally be rewarded."

William Streshley and Mac Bernd (1992) concur with Stevens' perspective. Their article "School Reform: Real Improvement Takes Time" points to the need for a single, sustained vision over a significant period, and argues that lack of consistency in leadership is a chief reason why school reform fails. The vision of reform must last "long enough to allow the entire organization to embrace it. It lasts long enough to give the most creative members of the organization a framework for entrepreneurial activities. It lasts long enough to demonstrate results, so that educators can see the fruits of their labors."

To illustrate their point, they cite a case study in California where one district had the benefit of ten years of uninterrupted growth derived from a stable organizational vision. The result was greater labor stability and peace, academic scores in the top 20 percent in the state, and a continued improvement in student achievement, even though the socioeconomic index went down during this time. Streshly and Bernd note that the very endurance of the vision indicates that real reform is possible; reform can be more than just another educational "fad" or "buzzword."

Educators stress that the importance of a clear, sustained vision enacted over time is important to every level of educational restructuring, not just in the area of administration or leadership. All members of a school district must be willing to commit to a long-term vision of the future, not just a short-term "quick fix" that will be discarded if it doesn't yield instant results. Kathleen Fitzpatrick (1991) reinforces the need for commitment to the future:

> Our struggle to define the direction learning should take for our students has taken us down a challenging road. The restructuring of our schools within an outcome-based framework rests on the conviction that we cannot afford to merely hope that outcomes of significance for our students might somehow become the consequences of our decisions. Rather, we believe that such outcomes must be the definers, the driving force behind each of our decisions, so that our students will arrive successfully in the future.

# Conclusion

Most schools in Oregon are just beginning the transition to outcomes-based restructuring. While a few, such as Troutdale, have developed their exit outcomes and begun to design down from there, many districts are still mapping out what their OBE program will look like. As they embark upon this adventure, educators at Oregon schools point to several keys to success: acknowledging the length and difficulty of the process, setting manageable goals, and accepting transitional measures for now.

"Don't try to rush," cautions Mike Weddle, a teacher at Waldo Middle School. Weddle guesses that his district may be a bit farther along than others in Oregon, but admits that it's been a painstaking process of development. Karen Goirigolzarri, assistant principal at Roseburg Senior High, says that time constraints are sometimes a real source of pressure. "It's scary because of how much we need to get done... time is an issue."

Julie Taylor, a teacher at North Eugene, feels a similar sense of tension. She recommends that educators "keep in mind that it's a process. It's rewarding, but very time consuming." Although the clock and calendar can exert pressure on a process that requires careful planning, Julie McCann, a teacher at Fairplay Elementary School, feels that sometimes pressure is what's needed to shake loose old systems. "I welcome this crisis," she admits, "because it forces us to open our eyes."

One way that districts in Oregon seem to be managing time pressures is to set manageable goals rather than try to restructure an entire program from the inside out. Educators speak of "getting to the next level," and "being ready to take the next step." Dennis Sizemore, assistant principal at Reynolds High School, feels comfortable with the planning work that his district has done in establishing outcomes and specific performance indicators. For him, the next step is fully linking assessments to deeper exit outcomes. "Our people talk the talk," he quips, "but they don't yet walk the walk."

At North Eugene High, only a third of the teachers are employing

OBE methods. Julie Taylor, a teacher at North, says the next big adjustment will be next year, when all the teachers are involved in the implementation process. Taking the restructuring process in phases, one step at a time, prevents schools from becoming overwhelmed or getting discouraged. In addition, they are able to savor the completion of smaller goals while continuing to keep an eye on the big picture.

Knowing that they are in transition and accepting change as normal helps districts to better cope with the demands of restructuring. At Waldo Middle School, for example, a portfolio assessment program has been initiated, though it may be modified as specific challenges arise once the ideas are applied in the classroom. And at North Eugene, Taylor warns, "Don't set standards in stone." She and other staff members are aware that some components of their program will change once they are put into practice.

Some schools have created programs that, although they aren't a perfect match with the OBE model, seem to be working very well and could provide a bridge toward Transformational OBE. David Conley, professor of education at the University of Oregon and OBE consultant, points to the success some schools have experienced with using a two-strand approach, basing outcomes around literacy and numeracy.

Julie McCann, a teacher at Fairplay Elementary in Corvallis, insists that "the basics are important" and that "our concern is not so much with having a list of outcomes to check off as much as it is raising awareness." The shape of their OBE program as it stands now is working for them, though it will continue to grow and change as needed. Adds McCann, "every experience changes my perspective."

Keeping one eye fixed firmly on the vision while accepting the dynamic nature of the restructuring process seems to be the key to making a smooth, successful transition to OBE. Educators say it also helps to remind yourself who you're really doing it for—the students. "It's critical that we keep in mind that the purpose of all this is improving student performance," McCann asserts. Sizemore's view is similarly direct: "It seems like the right thing to do for kids."

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